

Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W

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FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2962

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DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO WHITE HOUSE

E.O. 11652: XGDS3

TAGS: MARR, OVIP (CARAMANLIS, CONSTANTINE), GR, US

SUBJECT: BASE NEGOTIATIONS AND POSSIBLE CARAMANLIS VISIT TO THE U.S.

REF: (A) STATE 51066, (B) ATHENS 1909

1. DURING A SMALL GROUP MEETING THIS MORNING (MARCH 3) WITH DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY LAINGEN, THE AMBASSADOR AND OTHERS, FOREIGN MINISTER BITSIOS RAISED THE SUBJECT OF THE PACE OF THE U.S. - GREEK BASE NEGOTIATIONS. BITSIOS EXPRESSED A GENERAL FEELING OF SATISFACTION AS TO PROGRESS MADE IN THESE NEGOTIATIONS TO DATE AND EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT WE HAD MET WITH SUCCESS IN SOLVING "SOME VERY DELICATE AND TRICKY MATTERS." HE FELT THAT "GOOD ORDER" HAS NOW BEEN EFFECTED WITHIN GREECE ON THE BASES ISSUE, WITHOUT AT THE SAME TIME HAVING HARMED U.S. DEFENSIVE NEEDS IN GREECE AND WITHOUT HAVING CREATED PRECEDENTS WHICH OTHERS MIGHT EXPLOIT.

2. BITSIOS SAID, HOWEVER, THAT ONE PROBLEM REMAINS AND THAT IS THE QUESTION OF "TIME." HE TOLD US THAT CERTAIN ELEMENTS WITHIN GREECE HAVE TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF THE PROLONGED TIME DURING WHICH OUR BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT AND HAVE USED THAT TIME TO PROMOTE SPECULATION ON THE OUTCOME AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AGREEMENTS. HE STATED FLATLY THAT THE MOMENT HAS COME NOW TO SPEED UP THE NEGOTIATIONS AND TO CONCLUDE THE

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AGREEMENTS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. BITSIOS ASSERTED THAT WE

SHOULD NOW "SET A TIME LIMIT," AND THAT THE TERMINAL DATE SHOULD BE APRIL 15. HE THEN FURTHER AMPLIFIED HIS REMARKS BY STATING THAT "IF THE VISIT OF PRIME MINISTER CARAMANLIS TO THE U.S. IS TO TAKE PLACE THIS JUNE "WE MUST ALLOW HIM TIME TO DEAL WITH PARLIAMENT, DEFEND THE BASE AGREEMENTS THERE, TO EXPLAIN THEM TO PUBLIC OPINION, AND THEN FINALLY TO PUT THE MATTER ASIDE. BY SETTING AN APRIL 15 DATE, THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD HAVE SIX WEEKS TO ACCOMPLISH HIS MISSION--AND HE FEELS HE NEEDS AT LEAST THIS TIME. BITSIOS CONTINUED BY COMMENTING THAT THE SETTING OF THIS MID-APRIL DATE IS NOT REPEAT NOT AT ALL "A WHIM." IF PRIME MINISTER CARAMANLIS IS TO COME TO THE U.S. IN JUNE, "HIS HANDS MUST BE FREE." BITSIOS SAID THAT HE IS SURE THAT BOTH PRESIDENT FORD AND SECRETARY KISSINGER WOULD UNDERSTAND THESE CONCLUSIONS. LAINGEN AND THE AMBASSADOR SAID THEY WOULD CONVEY THE PRIME MINISTER'S DESIRES ON THIS MATTER TO WASHINGTON IMMEDIATELY.

3. TWO SPECIAL ASPECTS OF BASE NEGOTIATIONS WERE ALSO TREATED IN OUR DISCUSSIONS TODAY. ONE RELATED TO THE GREEK PROPOSAL ON THE EARMARKING OF SPECIAL FORCES FOR NATO (ATHENS 1909). THE AMBASSADOR AND MR. LAINGEN ASSURED BITSIOS THAT THE DEPARTMENT WAS PLEASED THAT THE GOG HAD SUBMITTED ITS PROPOSAL IN THIS REGARD AND THEY ASSURED HIM THAT IT WAS BEING GIVEN CLOSE AND INTENSIVE STUDY IN WASHINGTON (STATE'S 51066) THE OTHER QUESTION RELATED TO SOUDA BAY. MR. LAINGEN TOLD MINISTER BITSIOS THAT THE USG STRONGLY DESIRES THE REMOVAL OF RESTRICTIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN PLACED ON OUR ACCESS THERE. IN THIS REGARD, THE AMBASSADOR POINTED OUT THAT THE MINISTER'S PRIOR ASSERTION THAT THE U.S. HAD ENJOYED CONTINUED USES OF ITS FACILITIES IN GREECE THROUGHOUT THE PERIOD OF THE BASE NEGOTIATIONS WAS INACCURATE AS IT RELATED TO SOUDA BAY AND EMPHASIZED THAT WE HAVE INDEED NOT ENJOYED SUCH ACCESS THERE. MINISTER BITSIOS ASSERTED IN RESPONSE THAT A REVERSION TO THE 1959 AGREEMENT WOULD SEEM A REASONABLE INTERIM STEP.

4. UPON DEPARTING, AMBASSADOR CALOGERAS (WHO WAS ALSO PRESENT AT THE MEETING) TOLD THE AMBASSADOR AND

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MR. LAINGEN THAT HE PERSONALLY WOULD BE WILLING TO SPEND EXTRA TIME IN THE U.S. LATER THIS MONTH IF IT WOULD HELP TO CONCLUDE THE BASE NEGOTIATIONS SOONER. ON THE "EARMARKING OF GREEK UNITS," CALOGERAS STRESSED THAT THE IMPORTANT THING FOR THE U.S. SIDE TO KNOW IS THAT IN THE CASE OF A GENERAL WAR OR CONFRONTATION, "WE ARE ON YOUR SIDE, YOU CAN BE SURE OF THAT." HE SAID THAT THIS SHOULD BE THE SIGNIFICANT THEME UNDERLYING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF

THE EARMARKING ARRANGMENTS.

5. COMMENT: I WAS QUITE SURPRISED AT BITSIOS' OPEN REFERENCE IN THIS MEETING TO THE POSSIBILITY OF CARAMANLIS MAKING A TRIP TO THE U.S. IN JUNE. I HAVE BEEN EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH A VISIT VERY PRIVATELY WITH CARMANLIS -- ON THE BASIS OF EARLIER INSTRUCTIONS FROM WASHINGTON -- AND CARAMANLIS HAS BEEN EXTREMELY TOUCHY ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF A LEAK BEFORE AGREEMENT WAS REACHED, FEARING THAT PREMATURE PUBLICITY WOULD TRIGGER STRONG CRITICISM IN GREECE AND ABORT THE WHOLE ENTERPRISE. UNTIL VERY RECENTLY EVEN BITSIOS WAS UNAWARE OF IT -- AND NO ONE ELSE IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY. AGREEMENT HAS NOT REPEAT NOT BEEN FINALLY REACHED ON A VISIT NOR THE DATES THEREOF, ALTHOUGH I AM HOPEFUL AND BELIEVE THIS CAN BE FINALLY WORKED OUT VERY SOON. IN THE MEANTIME, I URGE THAT DEPARTMENT OFFICERS TREAT THIS INFORMATION WITH UTMOST DISCRETION. A DEPARTMENT "REPRESENTATIVE'S" REPORTED COMMENT ON THIS SUBJECT TO A WASHINGTON-BASED GREEK NEWSPAPERMAN (SEE SEPTTEL) UNFORTUNATELY MADE HEADLINE NEWS IN ATHENS TODAY.

6. WE WOULD APPRECIATE DEPARTMENT'S REACTION TO BITSIOS' COMMENTS ABOUT SPEEDING UP THE PACE OF THE BASE NEGOTIATIONS AND PARTICULARLY ABOUT THE FEASIBILITY OF CONCLUDING THEM BY APRIL 15. AS THE DEPARTMENT IS AWARE, WE DISCUSSED INFORMALLY WITH CALOGERAS THE HOLDING OF THE FOURTH ROUND IN THE FIRST WEEK OF MAY AND HE HAD INDICATED, AS LATE AS THIS WEEK (ATHENS 1907), THAT THIS WOULD PROBABLY BE ACCEPTABLE TO THE GREEK GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, BITSIOS LEFT NO DOUBT IN OUR MINDS TODAY AS TO THE IMPORTANCE THE GREEK GOVERNMENT ATTACHES TO THE NOW PROPOSED ACCELERATION IN THE SCHEDULE.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MILITARY BASES, NEGOTIATIONS, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, COLLECTIVE SECURITY AGREEMENTS, HEAD OF GOVERNMENT VISITS, CAT-C
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 MAR 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: coburnhl
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976ATHENS02007
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X3
Errors: N/A
Film Number: P850107-2444
From: ATHENS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t197603101/aaaadlfg.tel
Line Count: 155
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NODS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Reference: 76 STATE 51066, 76 ATHENS 1909
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: coburnhl
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 30 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <30 APR 2004 by woolflhd>; APPROVED <18 AUG 2004 by coburnhl>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BASE NEGOTIATIONS AND POSSIBLE CARAMANLIS VISIT TO THE U.S.
TAGS: MARR, OVIP, GR, US, (BITSIOS, DIMITRIOS), (CARAMANLIS, CONSTANTINE)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006